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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 DUBLIN 000628

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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY TOUR D'HORIZON WITH TOP IRISH
OFFICIALS: BILATERAL RELATIONS EXCELLENT

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Classified By: Ambassador Thomas Foley; Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

¶1. (C) Deputy Secretary John Negroponte and Undersecretary for Democracy and Global Affairs and Special Envoy to Northern Ireland Paula Dobriansky met Irish Prime Minister Brian Cowen and Foreign Minister Micheal Martin on November 17. Discussions included the Northern Ireland Peace process, the Lisbon Treaty, Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantanamo detainees, counterterrorism, and immigration. Both the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister expressed deep appreciation for the continued commitment of the USG to Ireland, especially in promoting economic development, cultural exchange and peace in Northern Ireland. All agreed that the bilateral relationship was -- and would continue to be -- in the words of Foreign Minister Martin, "warm and strong." End summary.

Northern Ireland

¶2. (C) Cowen revealed that Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) have engaged in extended discussions in recent weeks over the issue of devolution of policing and justice, which, he said, should result in an agreement about how to proceed, perhaps by the end of the year. Agreement on the modalities of devolution had already been reached between the two parties, he said, leaving only the contentious issue of the timeframe for actual devolution. Cowen said he expected an "indicative" timeframe to be agreed, i.e., benchmarks toward actual implementation that that each side could live with. He stated that both parties had an interest in proceeding quickly and in good faith because the European Parliament elections -- on the horizon in June 2009 -- would provide an opportunity for splinter groups, especially on the unionist side, to establish electoral bases and fragment the unity of the major parties. Especially gratifying, Cowen said, was that republicans and unionists in the North were working out the political solutions themselves, without the intervention of Westminster, Dublin or Washington. He said he was also encouraged because, from his perspective, the "dynamic" between DUP First Minister Peter Robinson and Sinn Fein Deputy First Leader Martin McGuinness had recently improved.

¶3. (C) Saying, "You did make a difference and continue to do so," Martin credited the USG with being a catalyst in achieving peace in Northern Ireland. He described the backdrop to current republican/unionist relations, stressing that the British and Irish governments were working hard to present seamless positions to the political parties in the North. He echoed Cowen in saying that resolution of the disagreement over the devolution of policing and justice was

moving in the right direction. Nonetheless, he described the failure of the Northern Ireland Assembly Executive (Cabinet) to meet since June 2008 (largely because of the debate over policing and justice) as having reached "crisis proportions."

Department of Foreign Affairs Political Director Rory Montgomery emphasized the need for the Executive to meet saying that there was a real loss of confidence in the political process on the part of many people in Northern Ireland.

14. (C) Under Secretary Dobriansky told Martin about discussions she had had with Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams recently, in which Adams had asked her to intervene with DUP leader Peter Robinson over the issue of devolution of policing and justice. The Under Secretary said she had advised Adams that it would be more productive if he could reach agreement with Robinson without U.S. intervention. Adams, she said, considered her advice and concurred. She noted that this was the first time in her tenure as Special Envoy that Adams had decided the USG should not try to intervene with unionists. Martin expressed his appreciation of this tactic, saying that it was very important for the parties in the North to sort out the issue of policing and justice themselves. He pointed out that it was essential for both the citizens of Northern Ireland and the international community to gain greater confidence in the institutions of Northern Ireland -- policing and justice being among the most critical.

Lisbon Treaty

15. (C) Cowen stated that the Irish Government is currently in discussion with the European Council about Irish concerns

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that caused the Irish electorate to reject the Lisbon Treaty in a referendum in June 2009. He indicated that he agreed with his European partners that the Lisbon Treaty would make the EU a stronger institution, to the benefit of the member states. He declared, "It is the Irish Government's job to create the circumstances where (passage of the Lisbon Treaty) will happen. This is very important for the nation." He expressed the opinion that the Irish electorate was becoming more aware of the consequences of voting 'No' on the treaty and rejecting EU solidarity, pointing to the economic meltdown in Iceland as an example of what can happen to a small country that is not part of a larger block. He stated that many votes in the June referendum were siphoned off by the 'No' camp by single-issue allegations (e.g., the Treaty would introduce conscription into an European army, raise taxes, legalize abortion, and eliminate Ireland's EU commissioner). These, he said, could be effectively countered. He predicted that the focus of a second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty would be "are we in or are we out of the EU?" (Comment: While Cowen didn't explicitly say that there would be second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, his remarks were clearly based on the premise that there would be one. Nonetheless, he clearly didn't relish the prospect of appearing before the European Council in December to discuss the way forward, describing it as "another challenge" since he wouldn't be able to pin down a date to get the Lisbon Treaty process back on track; a commitment expected by other EU member states. End comment.)

Iraq

16. (C) Describing Iraq as "a good news story," the Deputy Secretary described the situation there as much improved. Cowen and Martin both noted the importance of the recent signing of the Status of Forces Agreement, though the Deputy Secretary noted that the agreement still needs to be ratified by the Council of Representatives. Though there are still

hotspots in Iraq, the Deputy Secretary noted that the Iraqis have enough money from oil exports to implement critical programs (unlike Afghanistan) and that other Arab countries were beginning to engage the Iraqi government diplomatically.

Afghanistan

¶7. (C) The Deputy Secretary told Cowen that the international mission in Afghanistan is not going well, saying that the Afghan government must be assisted in building up its army and police forces and that international partners, such as Ireland, could assist in this important endeavor. Stronger security forces in Afghanistan, he said, was the exit strategy for international forces. Cowen made no substantive reply. (Note: Seven Irish troops serve with NATO forces in Afghanistan under the Partnership for Peace program and Ireland has allocated over USD 16 million for relief, recovery and development assistance there. End note.) The Deputy Secretary also expressed condolences for the recent death of an Irish soldier in Afghanistan, who had been serving with the British army.

¶8. (C) Though Martin was also noncommittal about the possibility of additional Irish involvement in Afghanistan, he reported a discussion he had had recently with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, in which Steinmeier stated that there was "no possibility" of sending German troops to the Southern region of Afghanistan and that the Germans would not further increase support for the Afghani Government.

Guantanamo Detainees

¶9. (C) During the meeting with Martin, the question of whether President-elect Obama would close Guantanamo was raised by Montgomery. The Deputy Secretary noted that the President-elect has publicly stated he would close the facility, but predicted that closing the center would be very difficult without the help of allies in resettling those detainees who were not considered a threat, but could not be returned to their own countries for fear they would be tortured or killed. Martin noted that several NGOs had been lobbying his office to accept some of these detainees, but was non-committal about what decision his government might make.

Counterterrorism

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¶10. (C) Martin noted that the Irish Government did not have legislation specifically aimed at dealing with terrorism, so terrorist threats had to be dealt with under ordinary criminal law. He noted, however, that the Irish Government recognized that some terrorist threats needed to be preempted in order to prevent them, which was difficult under criminal law. He indicated that Ireland needed to seek some middle ground between the U.S. counterterrorism legislation and the inclination of the EU to rely on ordinary criminal law to deal with counterterrorism.

U.S. Investment in Ireland

¶11. (U) Cowen expressed his appreciation for the high level of U.S. investment in Ireland. (Note: USD 87 billion is currently invested in Ireland by over 600 American companies. End note.) In spite of the economic downturn and the global financial crisis, Cowen said he was gratified by the

continuing infusion of new U.S. investment in Ireland and by the robust number of new investment inquiries from the U.S. He pointed out that an estimated 70,000 people in the U.S. work for Irish companies that have invested in America.

¶12. (C) Under Secretary Dobriansky reiterated her strong support for economic growth in Northern Ireland, telling Martin that she had arranged for Northern Ireland leaders to make a presentation to a business forum meeting of Fortune 500 companies at the Department of State in early December, providing Northern Ireland with an opportunity to continue the economic momentum generated by the U.S.-sponsored international investment conference in Belfast in May 2008. Martin expressed great appreciation of the initiative.

Immigration

¶13. (SBU) Both Cowen and Martin voiced their concern about the status of Irish living illegally in the U.S. The Deputy Secretary acknowledged the problem as a part of a broader issue in the U.S., noting President Bush's effort to achieve a comprehensive immigration legislation in 2007. Though immigration is important, the Deputy Secretary said, the Obama administration had other more critical issues to deal with so it was hard to say when the problem of immigration would be dealt with.

Pre-Clearance Agreement

¶14. (U) Cowen expressed his delight at the imminent signing of a preclearance agreement that would make Shannon Airport (and later Dublin Airport) hubs for full preclearance of commercial and general aviation flights from Europe to the U.S., calling it a "great achievement." (Note: The agreement was signed in Washington on November 17 by DHS Secretary Micheal Chertoff and Irish Minister of Transport Noel Dempsey. End note.)

Strategic Review of U.S.-Irish Relations

¶15. (U) Both Cowen and Martin referred to Ireland's ongoing strategic review of U.S.-Irish relations, being carried out by Irish Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Collins, as an opportunity to strengthen the bilateral relation. Cowen said that the report would be finished by the end of the year.

U.S. Foreign and Domestic Policy

¶16. (C) Cowen expressed his appreciation of President Bush's focus on world economic affairs, noting the importance of the special G-20 meeting on the financial crisis the President had convened in Washington. The Deputy Secretary said the President intended to "sprint to the finish" in pursuing his foreign and domestic policy goals. He also noted that the President was completely committed to assisting the transition of President-elect Obama.

Comment

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¶17. (U) Both the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister expressed deep appreciation for the continued commitment of the USG to Ireland, especially in promoting economic development, cultural exchange and peace in Northern Ireland. All agreed that the bilateral relationship was -- and would

continue to be -- in the words of Foreign Minister Martin,
"warm and strong."

18 (U) Cable cleared by D. staff.
FOLEY